

Women's Heart Health at Every Age

By Dima Quraini, MD

Heart disease is not a “man’s disease” - it is the leading cause of death in women in the US. Death from coronary heart disease (CHD) is increasing in women ages 35-54, possibly due to the rise of obesity and diabetes. Because of this, women of all ages should remain cognizant of the risk factors and symptoms of heart disease, as well as what they can do to reduce their risk of developing the disease.

Heart Health During Your 20s, 30s and Early 40s

Studies have identified risk factors associated with the development and complications of heart disease. Although usually applied to people over the age of 40, these risk factors can also be applied to young adults.

Risk factors of CHD include both modifiable and non-modifiable factors. “A woman cannot change her age, family history, or presence or absence of diabetes,” says Dr. Quraini. “However, she can improve modifiable risk factors like tobacco use, elevated cholesterol levels, hypertension, obesity and a sedentary lifestyle.”

A positive family history for heart disease is suggested if one’s mother suffered from CHD at an age younger than 65, or if one’s father suffered from CHD at an age younger than 55. Heart disease occurring in older parents can also increase one’s risk of developing heart disease.

According to Dr. Quraini, starting at age 20, women should have a fasting lipid profile checked at every five years. The fasting lipid profile consists of measuring triglycerides (fat), total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol) and HDL cholesterol (good cholesterol).

Heart Health During Your 50s, 60s and Beyond

Estrogen is believed to protect women from CHD and explains the lower incidence of heart disease in pre-menopausal women compared to men. However, use of hormone replacement therapy and selective estrogen receptor modulators (SERMs) should not be used for prevention of heart disease in post-menopausal women, as they may actually be harmful.

In general, women benefit from the same therapies as men - except, the use of daily aspirin to prevent cardiovascular disease in women under 65 is not recommended. Women with coronary heart disease, on the other hand, do benefit from daily aspirin and other medical therapies.

At all ages, women could decrease their risk of cardiovascular disease by:

- maintaining an ideal weight and waist circumference
- pursuing regular exercise
- eating a healthy diet rich in vegetable and fruits, low in salt
- avoiding smoking

By following the above recommendations, you can prevent the development of - or even treat - hypertension and hypercholesterolemia.

The multidisciplinary cardiovascular services team at Morton Hospital provides advanced diagnostic tests and treatment options for patients with a wide range of cardiac and vascular conditions, including coronary artery disease, congestive heart failure, arrhythmia, peripheral vascular disease and stroke.

Our team has been recognized by the American Heart and American Stroke Associations for excellence in heart failure and stroke care. For more information about our cardiac care services, visit mortonhospital.org To make an appointment with one of our cardiovascular medicine specialists, call 1-800-488-5959. For information on services provided by our cardiovascular services department, call 508-828-7290.

References:

Mosca L, Benjamin EJ, Berra K, et al. Effectiveness-Based Guidelines for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease in Women-2011 Update. *J Am Coll Cardiol.* 2011; 57:1404-1423

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